TREASURED DEAD

THANOS KALAMIDAS

An Ovi Magazine Books Publication
©2026 Ovi Project Publication - All material is copyright of the Ovi magazine & the writer

Ovi books are available in Ovi magazine pages and they are for free.
If somebody tries to sell you an Ovi book please contact us immediately.

For details, contact: ovimagazine@yahoo.com

No part of this publication may be reproduced, printed or digital,
altered or selectively extracted by any means
(electronic, mechanical, print, photocopying, recording or otherwise)
without the prior written permission of the author or the publisher of this book.

Thanos Kalamidas

Treasured Dead

An Ovi Magazine Books Publication
©2026 Ovi Project Publication - All material is copyright of the Ovi magazine & the writer

An hour before sunset, on the kind of cool October evening that makes you remember every poor decision you ever made, a man on a motorcycle entered the town he'd sworn he'd left for good. The few persons who were at their windows regarded this traveller with a sort of distrust, which was fair, because I regarded the town with the same suspicion.

My name is not important. What matters is that I was supposed to be the smart one, the one who escaped the old neighbourhood, got the degree, the nice apartment, the dream motorbike. Proof that you could climb out of the shallow end of the gene pool and dry off. But everybody has a weak point, and odd as it might sound, mine was Bug-eye Marie.

And that is the only way I can explain ever getting mixed up in the foolishness that follows. It all began with a message, delivered by a nervous student who smelled of old books and newer panic, summoning me to the office of Professor Jon Rivers. I should have sensed the awkwardness of the fact that he didn't call. But Jon was a professor, and you expect professors to demonstrate certain eccentricities. Especially when they are literature professors who don't look like any kind of professor at all.

I thought he wanted to borrow money. I was wrong. And being wrong about Jon Rivers was about to turn my tidy, sensible life into a Jules Verne novel written by a committee of angry ghosts.

Chapter 1
The cartographer of lost causes

Jon Rivers was a little guy with a pointy nose, mousy greasy hair, and brown-silver eyes which stood out from his face like two half-buried marbles. He had an office outside the campus, a few blocks from my own place near the city-centre, and the black letters on his door read: *All history and all information, J. Rivers*. A man of mystery and modesty, Professor Jon Rivers.

His inner sanctum was a fire hazard disguised as a library. Six or seven thousand books, he'd once estimated, piled in floor-to-ceiling cases, leaving tiny alleys barely wide enough for a man of his diminutive stature. They'd invaded the kitchen and the entrance hall too. The whole apartment smelled of old paper, glue, and the faint, dusty scent of secrets.

When I arrived, he wasn't hunched over a rare manuscript or on his archaic computer. He was standing in the middle of the main room, holding a thick, yellowed envelope.

"You came," he said, his voice a dry rustle. "Good. I was worried you'd send a cheque."

"See, this is exactly what I thought was happening," I said, dropping my helmet on a stack of 19th-century travelogues. "A touch of the old guilt-tripped loan. How much this time, Jon? And please, for the love of God, don't tell me it's for a first edition of *The Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* again."

He didn't laugh. He just held out the envelope. "This isn't about money. It's about a treasure."

I did laugh then. "A treasure? Like, with a map and a big 'X' and a skeleton guarding it? Jon, you spend too much time in these books. The fresh air is getting to you."

"It's not a joke," he insisted, his marble-eyes glinting. He tapped the envelope. "This came for you. To my address. No return address. Postmarked from our neighbourhood. *Our* old neighbourhood."

That stopped me. The neighbourhood. The place with the small hill behind our houses. Bug Hill, we'd called it.

I took the envelope. It was addressed to me, care of J. Rivers, Esq. My full name. My full, legal name that no one from that time ever used.

Inside was not a map, not in the traditional sense. It was a single sheet of heavy, old-fashioned paper. On it was a meticulous, almost obsessively detailed drawing of Bug Hill. But it was a cross-section, as if someone had sliced the hill in two with a giant knife. There were tunnels drawn, and chambers, and in the very heart of it, a crude symbol: an eye.

And in the corner, in a handwriting I hadn't seen in twenty years, were the words: *You owe me. You know where. — M.*

"Bug-eye Marie," I whispered. The nickname felt dirty in my mouth.

"Indeed," Jon said, finally allowing a small, tight smile. "It would seem your childhood friend has found something under that hill. And she believes you are the only one who can help her get it."

I stared at the drawing. The tunnels. The eye. It was insane. It was a childhood fantasy. It was a treasure hunt, the kind you grow out of by the time you're twelve.

But my hands were shaking. “Why send it to you? Why not just call me herself?”

Jon Rivers, the man who knew all the history and all the information about everyone in town, living or dead, looked at me with something like pity.

“Because,” he said softly, gesturing to a newspaper clipping that had fallen from the envelope, “I don’t think Marie *can* call anyone anymore.”

The clipping was from a local paper, dated two weeks prior. The headline read: *LOCAL WOMAN MISSING; PRESUMED LOST IN UNEXPLORED CULVERT COLLAPSE*. The photo was grainy, but I would have known that face anywhere. It was Marie. Bug-eye Marie. And the culvert they mentioned was at the base of Bug Hill.

Chapter 2
The gravity of going back

The world tilted. Not literally, but the tidy, sensible apartment with its nice furniture and my helmet on the travelogues suddenly felt like a stage set. A fake. The real world was that grainy photo and the crude drawing of an eye.

"Presumed lost?" My voice sounded like it belonged to someone else. "They just… presumed?"

"The collapse was significant," Jon said, taking the clipping back and laying it on a pile of books as if it were just another piece of paper. "The authorities deemed it too unstable to attempt a recovery. A sad accident. Case closed." He fixed me with those unsettling eyes. "But Marie didn't think it was an accident. She came to see me, three days before she went missing."

"She came to you? Why?"

"Because she knew I kept things," he said, waving a hand at his walls of knowledge. "Old town records. Geological surveys. Property deeds. She had a story, you see. A wild one. She'd been watching that hill her whole life, just like when we were kids. But she wasn't watching bugs anymore. She was watching *patterns*. The way the frost melted in the spring. The way certain weeds grew in a perfect circle at the top. She was convinced there was something man-made under there."

I remembered her then, not as the girl with the funny eyes, but as the girl with the intense focus. The girl who could sit for hours, utterly still, just observing. "She always did have a focus on her," I murmured.

"She did," Jon agreed. "And her focus led her to some old survey maps. There are mentions of an old well or mine shaft on that land, pre-dating the houses. Officially, it was sealed and forgotten. She believed it was a doorway."

"A doorway to what?" I asked, the absurdity of the conversation crashing back in. "A treasure? Come on, Jon. This is nonsense. It's a kid's game."

"Is it?" he challenged. "She claimed to have found something in the town archives. A mention of a local legend. A story from the very early 1800s about a trapper who stumbled upon a cave in that hill. He came out raving about a 'god-awful secret' and a 'treasure that was no treasure.' He was found dead a week later, clutching a piece of ore that no one could identify." He picked up a small, dark, misshapen rock from his desk. I hadn't noticed it before. "She brought me this. Said she found it near the culvert's entrance, before the collapse."

He handed it to me. It was surprisingly heavy, and warm to the touch, as if it had a low-grade fever. Its surface was smooth in some places and jagged in others, and it had a faint, unpleasant oily sheen.

"What is it?" I asked, my thumb tracing a strangely warm groove.

"I have no idea," Jon admitted. "It's not like any mineral I can find a reference for. And I have a lot of references." He gestured to the thousands of books. "That, my friend, is the gravity of the situation. It's not about gold. It's about the unknown. And Marie, your Marie, walked into that unknown three days ago. Now, are you going to leave her there?"

The question hung in the dusty air. The smart thing, the sensible thing, would have been to walk out. Call the police, give them the map, let the professionals handle it. But the police had already declared her lost. And she hadn't sent this map to the police. She'd sent it to me. *You owe me.* And damn it, she was right. I owed her for a hundred small kindnesses from a childhood I'd spent trying to forget.

"I'm going to need equipment," I said, the words tasting like surrender. "Rope. Lights. Something to dig with."

Jon's smile returned, wider this time. It was the smile of a man who'd just won a very long and very strange bet with himself. "I took the liberty," he said, and pointed to a corner behind a stack of encyclopaedias. There was a brand-new, heavy-duty hiking backpack, a coiled length of climbing rope, a hard hat with a powerful lamp, and a crowbar.

"You were that sure I'd go?"

"No," he said, his voice dropping to a conspiratorial whisper. "I was that sure you'd come back here first, so you'd have no excuse not to. Now, let's go. My car is outside. According to Marie's map, the entrance isn't the collapsed culvert. It's a root cellar on the property

of the abandoned house between yours and hers. The entrance to the tunnels is in the cellar floor."

The abandoned house. The Jenkins place. It had been empty for decades, a rotting skeleton of wood and bad memories, sitting right on top of Bug Hill. The perfect, clichéd, terrifying starting point for a treasure hunt I never wanted to be on.

Chapter 3
The mouth of the beast

The Jenkins place hadn't just aged; it had decayed with a kind of malevolent purpose. The porch had collapsed in on itself like a broken jaw, and the windows were sightless eyes staring out at the overgrown yard. Jon parked his rattling compact car a respectful distance away, and we approached under the sickly yellow glow of a quarter-moon. The air was cold and still, carrying the smell of wet earth and rot.

"This is insane," I muttered for the dozenth time, the heavy pack digging into my shoulders. "We're breaking and entering. We're going to find nothing but raccoons and old beer cans."

"We're investigating a possible missing person's case with new evidence," Jon corrected me primly, clutching a powerful flashlight in one hand and Marie's map in the other. "That's citizen's duty."

The back door hung by one rusty hinge. We slipped inside. The kitchen was a nightmare of peeling linoleum and the skeletal remains of cabinets. The air was thick and stale. Jon's light swept across the floor, past a crumbling table, until it landed on a square, heavy trapdoor set into the corner, just as Marie's map had promised.

A rusted iron ring was set flush with the wood. I knelt, my knees popping in the profound silence, and hooked my fingers through it. "If a giant spider grabs my hand, I'm going to be very upset."

"Just lift," Jon whispered, his voice tight with excitement.

I heaved. The wood groaned in protest, then gave way with a shriek of ancient hinges, revealing a set of rough stone steps leading down into absolute blackness. A smell wafted up from below—not the smell of a damp cellar, but something drier, older, and strangely metallic. It was the smell of the warm rock Jon had given me, but amplified a thousand times.

I clicked on my hard hat lamp. The beam cut a clean white line down the steps, revealing a floor of packed earth about fifteen feet below.

"Well," I said, trying to keep my voice steady. "After you, Professor. All history and all information awaits."

Jon didn't hesitate. The little man scrambled down the steps with the agility of a spider. I followed, my heart thumping a frantic rhythm against my ribs. The cellar was small, maybe ten by ten, with old wooden shelves holding nothing but dust. But on the far wall, low to the ground, was a hole. It wasn't a carefully constructed tunnel entrance. It was a ragged tear in the earth, as if something had pushed through from the other side. Its edges were smooth, almost glassy, and that oily sheen was visible even in the artificial light.

"This is new," Jon said, kneeling to examine it. "The masonry on the cellar wall has been pushed outwards. From the inside." He looked up at me, and for the first time, I saw a flicker of genuine fear in his marble eyes. "She didn't dig her way in. Something dug its way out."

The warmth from the rock in my pocket seemed to pulse against my leg. I stared into the maw of the tunnel. It sloped downwards at a steep angle, curving to the left. The air coming from it was noticeably warmer, and it carried a faint, rhythmic thrumming, like a giant's slow heartbeat.

"Marie?" I called out, my voice swallowed by the oppressive silence. No answer. Just that thrum. Thrum. Thrum.

I pulled the crowbar from the pack. It felt pathetically inadequate. "Okay," I said, my mouth dry. "Let's go find her. But if we see a giant ant, we are running. No discussions, no heroic last stands. We run."

Jon nodded, his face pale in the glow of our combined lights. "Agreed. This has moved beyond the purview of literature."

We crawled into the tunnel, leaving the world of sensible apartments and dream motorbikes behind. The earth was warm, almost hot, to the touch. The walls were strangely smooth, and as we progressed, I began to see markings. Faint, almost imperceptible lines, etched into the glassy surface. They weren't words. They were… patterns. Geometric shapes that

hurt to look at for too long. They reminded me of the way Marie used to arrange her bugs in the dirt, creating tiny, intricate cities.

We had entered the kingdom of Bug-eye Marie, and it was nothing like the world above.

Chapter 4
The geometry of descent

For what felt like an hour, we crawled and slid down that warm, humming tube. The tunnel was not uniform; it widened and narrowed, dipped and rose, defying any logical sense of geology. It felt organic, like travelling through the gullet of some immense, slumbering beast. The marks on the walls grew more frequent, more complex, forming patterns that seemed to shift in the corner of your eye. Jon, despite his fear, was fascinated, muttering about non-Euclidean geometry and Lovecraft.

"It's a ruleset," he whispered at one point, his fingers tracing a series of concentric grooves. "This is a language. A very old, very alien language."

"It's a bunch of squiggles made by worms on steroids," I hissed back. "Keep moving."

Finally, the tunnel opened up. We tumbled out onto a ledge, and I got my first real look at where Marie had gone. My brain refused to process it for a solid ten seconds.

We were in a cavern. A vast, impossible cavern that should not have existed under a small hill in our town. It stretched beyond the reach of our lights, a cathedral of stone. But it wasn't natural. The walls were carved, not with tools, but with the same smooth, flowing geometry as the tunnel. And rising from the center of the cavern floor was a structure.

It looked like a hive. A black, glistening hive, thirty feet high, made of that same oily material. It was covered in holes of various sizes, and from within came the source of the thrumming—a deep, resonant pulse that vibrated in my teeth and made my skull ache. The air was thick with the smell of hot metal and something else, something sweet and cloying, like rotting honey.

And scattered at the base of the hive were Marie's things. A knapsack. A discarded flashlight, its beam long dead. And a single muddy hiking boot.

"Marie!" I shouted, my voice echoing uselessly in the vast space. The thrumming didn't stop. It seemed to get louder, as if responding to the sound.

Jon grabbed my arm, his grip surprisingly strong. His face was a mask of terror and awe. "The treasure," he breathed, pointing at the hive. "The trapper in 1810. He said it was a treasure that was no treasure. This… this is a repository. A… a nest."

A movement near the base of the hive caught my eye. A shadow detached itself from the larger darkness and shuffled towards us. It was human-shaped, but it moved with a strange, jerky, insectile gait. As it came into the light, I felt the crowbar slip from my numb fingers and clatter on the stone floor.

It was a man. Or it had been, once. He was dressed in tattered, filthy clothes that might have been from the 1970s. His skin was pale, almost translucent, and across it, like a terrible tattoo, were the same geometric patterns from the tunnel walls. They seemed to be etched *into* his flesh, glowing faintly with a sickly green light. His eyes were open, but they were completely black, with no iris or pupil. And from his mouth, instead of a scream or a plea for help, came a perfect imitation of the hive's thrum.

He took another jerky step towards us. Behind him, from the holes in the hive, more shapes began to emerge, moving with that same horrible, disjointed grace.

I finally found my voice. It came out as a strangled croak. “Jon. We need to leave. Right now.”

He didn’t argue. We turned and scrambled back towards the tunnel, the thrumming growing louder, more insistent, a chorus of the damned calling us back to the dance.

Chapter 5
The calculus of flight

We didn't crawl back through the tunnel. We clawed, scrambled, and slithered like creatures possessed. The walls felt hotter now, the thrumming a physical pressure at our backs. I could hear them behind us, not running, but that jerky, relentless shuffling, a horrifying approximation of pursuit. They made no sound other than their constant, unified hum.

I pushed Jon ahead of me, grabbing his collar and practically throwing him up the steepest inclines. My lungs burned, not just from exertion, but from the thick, metallic air. My hard hat lamp bounced wildly, casting dancing shadows that seemed to reach for us.

"Faster!" I gasped, shoving him again. "They're gaining!"

We burst out of the tunnel and into the root cellar. I didn't stop. I grabbed Jon by the arm, hauled him to his feet, and literally threw him up the stone steps. He crashed through the rotten trapdoor, which splintered under his weight. I was right behind him, diving through the gap into the kitchen as the first of those black-eyed things emerged from the hole in the cellar wall.

It looked up at me, its head tilting at an impossible angle, and let out a pulse of sound that wasn't quite a word but carried a clear, terrible meaning: *Stay.*

I didn't stay. I grabbed Jon, who was lying in a heap of broken wood, and we ran. We crashed through the back door, out into the night, the cold air a shocking slap after the oppressive warmth of the hive. We didn't stop running until we reached Jon's car, fumbled with the doors, and peeled away from the Jenkins place with a scream of tires.

We drove in silence for ten minutes, gasping for breath, our hearts hammering. Jon's face was smeared with dirt and sweat. I probably looked worse.

Finally, he spoke, his voice a shaky whisper. “What… what were they?”

“I don’t know,” I said, my knuckles white on the steering wheel. “But I think they were the treasure hunters. Every poor soul who found their way in over the last two hundred years. The trapper. Maybe some kids in the seventies. And now…”

“Marie,” Jon finished.

I nodded. I couldn’t speak her name. I’d seen what happened to the people in that place. They didn’t die. They were *changed*. Converted. Made part of the hive’s chorus.

Chapter 6
The library of Babel's nightmare

We ended back at Jon's apartment. It was after midnight, and the city was quiet, but my mind was a screaming chaos of geometric patterns and black eyes. Jon, however, had shifted from terrified survivor to obsessed researcher. The near-death experience had flipped a switch in his brain.

"It's a language," he kept muttering, pacing in circles through his narrow book-alleys. "And a vessel. A… a symbiote, perhaps. It doesn't kill. It… incorporates."

"I don't care what it is, Jon! It has Marie! It has her, and she's probably one of them by now!" I slammed my fist on a stack of books, sending a few tumbling. "We have to go back. We have to get her out!"

"And do what?" he shot back, his voice sharp. "Fight a hundred of those things with a crowbar? We don't even know what we're dealing with! We need information. We need to understand its *ruleset*."

He dove into his books, pulling volume after volume from the shelves. He grabbed the warm, oily rock she'd given him and placed it under a magnifying lamp. For hours, he worked, his little pointy nose inches from the pages, his marble eyes scanning text with desperate speed.

I sat in his worn armchair, staring at the map. The eye at the center. The eye. Marie's eye. What had she seen down there before the collapse? What had she discovered that made her send for me?

Just before dawn, Jon let out a cry. Not of fear, but of discovery. "Here! I knew it! A reference!"

He thrust a heavy, leather-bound book at me. It was a collection of obscure folklore from the region, published in 1888. He pointed a trembling finger at a yellowed page. The chapter was titled: "The God of the Mound: A Pagan Survival?"

The text described a local legend, passed down from the earliest settlers, about a "hill that sang" and was avoided by the indigenous people. It told of a man

who entered the hill and came out "marked by the earth-spirit," able to speak in tongues and predict the weather, but forever changed, his eyes turned black as coal. The settlers, being practical folk, assumed it was the devil's work and tried to seal the entrance with stones.

"The indigenous people didn't worship it," Jon breathed, his eyes wide. "They *contained* it. They understood its ruleset. It's not a god. It's a… a colony intelligence. A fungus, a hive-mind, something that grows and spreads by… by making more of itself. It offers knowledge, probably. In exchange for… for individuality. The patterns on their skin, that's its mycelium. It's growing on them, through them."

The rock on his desk seemed to pulse in agreement. It was a seed. A piece of the hive.

"Marie figured it out," I whispered, the horror of it finally crystallizing. "She didn't go in for treasure. She went in to study it. Like she studied the bugs. And it caught her."

"And she sent for you," Jon said, looking at me with a new, profound respect. "The only person she trusted. The one who left, who was smart enough to stay away. She wasn't asking you to save her. She was giving you the map. She was giving us the *warning*."

Chapter 7
The vibration of memory

The warning. That was the key. It wasn't a treasure map; it was a quarantine notice. Marie, my strange, bug-obsessed friend, had sacrificed herself to map the infection, to show us where it lived and how it spread. She'd sent the only person she trusted to make sure the secret didn't die with her.

But knowing the truth and doing nothing about it were two different things. We couldn't just leave her there. We couldn't let that… that *thing* continue to grow, sending out its warm, humming seeds to tempt the curious and the lost.

"We have to collapse it," I said, the idea forming slowly in my exhausted mind. "We have to bring the whole hill down on top of it. Seal it for good, like the settlers tried to do."

Jon nodded slowly. "The old culvert collapse was a start. But we need something bigger. More controlled." He tapped his fingers on a geological survey map. "There's an old quarry on the other side of the hill. Abandoned for years. If we could… persuade the rest of that hill to slide into it, it would bury the cavern under a hundred feet of rock."

"And how do we 'persuade' a hill to do anything?" I asked.

He gave me a sly, cunning look. "The same way they've been 'persuading' mountains to move for a century. With a really big bang. We need explosives."

Of course. Jon Rivers, the man of mystery and modesty, knew where to get explosives. He knew a guy, a retired quarryman who "owed him a favour" for finding a lost will. It was astounding, the dark little corners of knowledge this man inhabited.

The next two days were a blur of frantic, terrified preparation. We acquired the materials, industri-

al-grade blasting caps and ammonium nitrate fertilizer, hidden in the trunk of Jon's car like the world's worst road trip snacks. We studied the survey maps, calculating the precise point to place the charge to trigger the maximum collapse. We were amateurs playing at demolition experts, and the stakes were our lives, and Marie's soul.

On the second night, as we were going over the plan for the hundredth time, I felt it. A vibration. Not in the floor, but in my bones. In my teeth. A familiar, sickening thrum.

I looked at Jon. He felt it too. His face was pale. We both looked at the desk. The small, oily rock Marie had found was glowing. A faint, pulsing green light, in time with the thrum.

"They know we're here," Jon whispered. "The rock… it's a beacon. A piece of the hive. It's calling to them."

From outside, in the quiet street, we heard it. A shuffling sound. Jerky. Uncoordinated. And a low, humming chorus.

Chapter 8
The siege of little minds

I peered through the blinds. The streetlight at the corner cast a sickly pool of light on the pavement. And in that light, they stood. A dozen of them. Men, women, dressed in the decaying rags of decades past. Their skin was etched with glowing patterns, and their black eyes were all fixed on Jon's apartment building.

"They followed the signal," Jon breathed. "The rock's vibration. They're here for it. For us."

The thrumming grew louder, more insistent. The figures began to move, not towards the door, but spreading out, surrounding the building. They weren't attacking. They were *containing*. Just like the hive had contained Marie.

"We can't let them get the rock," I said. "Or us. We have to go. Now."

"But the plan—" Jon started.

"Plan's changed!" I grabbed the backpack with the blasting materials. Jon, without hesitation, snatched the glowing rock from his desk. It was a stupid, dangerous move, but leaving it for them was unthinkable.

We went out the back window, into the tiny, enclosed courtyard behind the building. The humming was all around us now. As my feet hit the ground, a shape shuffled out of the alleyway to our right. It was the man in the 70s clothes, the first one we'd seen. His black eyes fixed on Jon, on the rock in his hand, and he let out a pulse of sound that was pure, triumphant recognition.

Then another shape appeared to our left. And another behind it. They moved in, their jerky gait eating up the ground, their humming a song of victory.

"Give it to me," I hissed at Jon. "Run for the car. I'll draw them."

He looked at me, horrified. "You'll be..."

"I know. Go!"

I snatched the rock from his hand. The heat of it was incredible, pulsing with a life of its own. The effect on the creatures was immediate. Every single black eye swivelled towards me. The man in the 70s clothes stopped and tilted his head, as if listening to a new, more interesting voice.

"Come on, then!" I shouted, waving the rock like a madman. "You want this? Come and get it!"

I bolted for the opposite end of the courtyard, towards a rickety wooden fence. Behind me, I heard the shuffle of a dozen feet change direction, all of them now focused on me. I leaped, crashed through the rotting wood, and landed in a narrow alley, the rock burning in my hand, the hum of the hive-mind a deafening roar in my ears.

Chapter 9
The belly of the beast (Reprise)

I ran. I ran through back alleys, over fences, through yards where dogs barked and lights flicked on. I ran with a piece of a nightmare in my hand and an army of the damned at my heels. I could hear them, always behind me, never tiring, their hum a constant, horrifying soundtrack to my flight.

I didn't have a plan. I was just running on pure, animal instinct. But as I burst out of a residential street and saw the dark, looming shape of Bug Hill against the stars, I knew where I was going. I was going home. I was going back to the source.

The rock was guiding me, or maybe I was guiding it. The thrum in my hand was now in perfect sync with the thrum I could feel emanating from the hill itself. They were calling to each other. A conversation across the void.

I reached the Jenkins place, a darker shadow among shadows. The back door still hung open. I plunged inside, through the kitchen, and down into the root cellar. The hole in the wall was still there, a gaping maw of warmth and sound.

I didn't hesitate. I crawled in, the rock leading the way. The tunnel was different this time. The walls pulsed with a faint green light, and the geometric patterns writhed and shifted as I passed, as if welcoming me home. I could hear them behind me, my pursuers, their shuffling now a triumphant march.

I slid out onto the ledge overlooking the cavern. The hive was alive with light, pulsing with a rhythmic glow. The figures that had been attached to it, the older ones, turned their black eyes towards me. And standing at the front, her face etched with the same terrible patterns, her eyes two pools of infinite black, was Marie.

She was beautiful and horrifying. Her expression wasn't angry or pained. It was serene. Peaceful. She held out a hand to me, and from her lips came a voice that was hers, but also the voice of the hive, a thousand whispers layered into one.

"You came back. I knew you would. Don't be afraid. The fear is the only thing that hurts. Let it go. Join us. See what I see."

She opened her mind to me, and for a terrifying second, I did see. I saw the web of connection, the knowledge of centuries flowing through the hive. I saw the memories of every person it had absorbed, a library of human experience, preserved forever in the warm, humming dark. It was a treasure beyond imagining. And it was a fate worse than death.

"No," I whispered, clutching the rock. "This isn't you, Marie."

"It's more than I was," the hive-Marie replied. *"It's more than you are. Give me the seed. Complete the circle. Be at peace."*

I looked at the rock in my hand. The seed. The piece of the hive that had called them all here. And I looked at the backpack full of destruction on my shoulder.

"I'm not here to join," I said, my voice growing stronger. "I'm here to say goodbye."

I reached into the pack, pulled out one of the blasting caps, and jammed it deep into the warm, pulsing surface of the rock. Then, with all my strength, I threw it. Not at Marie. Not at the gathered creatures. I threw it as far as I could, towards the base of the great, black hive.

The seed, the beacon, the piece of their god, tumbled through the air and landed with a soft thump against the glistening wall. For a single, eternal second, everything was silent. Marie's black eyes widened in what might have been surprise. Or recognition. Or even thanks.

Then the world ended.

Chapter 10
The hill is just a hill again

The blast was immense. It wasn't just the cap detonating; it was the seed itself, a concentrated piece of that alien intelligence, being violently unmade. The shockwave ripped through the cavern, and the hive *screamed*. Not with one voice, but with a thousand, a million, a cacophony of pain and rage that was felt, not heard.

I was thrown back into the tunnel as the cavern ceiling began to fall. Rocks the size of cars crashed down around the hive, crushing it, burying it. The figures, Marie, the man from the 70s, all the lost souls, they didn't run. They stood, their black eyes fixed on the destruction of their god, and then they were swallowed by the falling mountain.

I crawled. I clawed and scrambled and fought my way back up that tunnel as the world collapsed behind me. The heat was incredible, the noise deafening. Rocks pelted my back, dust choked my lungs. I was buried, dug free, buried again. It was a nightmare of stone and suffocation.

And then, suddenly, I was out. I burst through the cellar floor, not through the tunnel, but through a new crack that had opened in the stone. I stumbled into the kitchen of the Jenkins place, which was now tilting at a crazy angle as the ground beneath it gave way. I dove through the back door and rolled onto the cold, wet grass just as the entire house collapsed into the giant sinkhole that was now the center of Bug Hill.

I lay there for a long time, gasping, crying, shaking. The thrumming was gone. The heat was gone. The only sound was the rumble of settling rock and the distant, panicked barking of dogs.

When the sun came up, it revealed a changed world. Bug Hill was gone. In its place was a vast, raw crater, a scar on the earth. The old quarry on the other side was half-filled with the debris of the collapse. It looked like a natural disaster. Which, I suppose, in a way, it was.

Jon found me there, hours later. His face was haggard, but his eyes were clear. He helped me to his car without a word. We drove away, leaving the crater and the ghosts behind.

Now, I'm back in my sensible apartment. My dream motorbike is in the shop; it needs a tune-up. I keep the news clipping about the "tragic and unexpected geological event" that swallowed the old Jenkins place. No one was hurt, they said. No one was reported missing.

But I know different. Bug-eye Marie is under that hill. Not as a victim, but as a sentinel. In that final moment, before the blast, I saw something in her black eyes. An awareness. A choice. She had gone in to understand, and in the end, she understood exactly what needed to be done. She let me throw that rock. She *wanted* me to.

The police called it a tragic accident. The geologists called it a fascinating phenomenon. I call it by its true name: a treasure hunt. And the treasure?

The treasure was the knowledge that some secrets are too heavy to carry, and the only way to keep them is to bury them deep, under a hill, with a friend who understands.

You owe me, her map had said.

I paid my debt. With interest.

And that, I suppose, is the only way I can explain ever getting mixed up in that foolishness any other way.

The End

Treasured dead

Thanos Kalamidas

Ovi eBook Publishing 2026

Ovi eBook Publishing
Design: Thanos

An Ovi Magazine Books Publication
©2026 Ovi Project Publication - All material is copyright of the Ovi magazine & the writer

Ovi books are available in Ovi magazine pages and they are for free.
If somebody tries to sell you an Ovi book please contact us immediately.

For details, contact: ovimagazine@yahoo.com

No part of this publication may be reproduced, printed or digital,
altered or selectively extracted by any means
(electronic, mechanical, print, photocopying, recording or otherwise)
without the prior written permission of the author or the publisher of this book.

TREASURED DEAD

Thanos Kalamidas, a multipublished writer, cartoonist and illustrator; born and grew up in a picturesque neighbourhood on the mountainside of Hymettus in Athens, Greece. Then his life took him to Berlin, Germany and to London, UK for studies. After a brief stay in Yorkshire he moved his life to Paris, France while working in Tokyo, Japan and in Cape Town, South Africa. In the last 25 years he became a permanent Scandinavian resident and recently, in his glorious sixth decade, he moved to a scenic village in the Växjö area.

THANOS KALAMIDAS